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RAMPAGE NATION

SECURING AMERICA FROM MASS SHOOTINGS

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in a class all by itself. No other advanced, Western democracy experiences the magnitude of gun violence that presently afflicts American society.²⁸ This is particularly true when it comes to mass shootings.²⁹

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The United States does little to regulate firearms, especially at the federal level.³⁰ While it goes to great lengths to restrict access to WMDs and IEDs, the same can't be said for its efforts to keep firearms out of the hands of high-risk individuals. Indeed, the American experience with gun control nationwide is so limited that it can actually be chronicled in a few bullet points:

- The National Firearms Act of 1934: Heavily regulated machine guns, short-barrel rifles and shotguns, and silencers.
- The Federal Firearms Act of 1938: Established a federal licensing system to regulate manufacturers, importers, and dealers of firearms.
- The Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968: Prohibited anyone under twenty-one years of age from purchasing a handgun.
- The Gun Control Act of 1968: Required that all interstate firearms transfers or sales be made through a federally licensed firearms dealer and prohibited certain categories of people—felons (indicted or convicted), fugitives, drug abusers, mentally ill persons (as determined by adjudication), illegal aliens, dishonorably discharged servicemen, US-citizenship renouncers, and domestic abusers—from possessing firearms.³¹
- The Firearm Owners Protection Act of 1986: Barred the purchase or transfer of automatic weapons without government approval.
- The Undetectable Firearms Act of 1988: Required that all firearms have at least 3.7 oz. of metal that can be detected by a metal detector.
- The Gun-Free School Zones Act of 1990: Criminalized possession or discharge of a firearm in a school zone.
- The Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act of 1993: Required

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that anyone attempting to purchase a firearm from a federally licensed dealer pass a background check.³²

- The Federal Assault Weapons Ban of 1994: Banned the sale and possession of semiautomatic assault weapons and extended-capacity magazines not grandfathered prior to the enactment of the law.³³

Of all of these measures, the National Firearms Act of 1934 and the Assault Weapons Ban of 1994 (AWB) were the only ones instituted primarily in an effort to reduce the carnage of mass shootings. The former was passed in response to a series of bloody gangland executions, including the infamous 1929 St. Valentine's Day massacre in Chicago.³⁴ While there are still machine guns in circulation, the National Firearm Act, in conjunction with the Firearm Owners Protection Act of 1986, sharply cut the availability of machine guns, which likely explains the complete elimination of massacres perpetrated with such automatic-fire weapons.

Like the National Firearms Act, the AWB was introduced following several high-profile mass shootings in the early 1990s: the Luby's restaurant, 101 California Street office complex, and Long Island Railroad train car massacres.³⁵ Signed into law by President Bill Clinton, the AWB went into effect on September 13, 1994. At the insistence of the gun-rights lobby, however, the bill contained a ten-year sunset provision. As Congress never renewed the ban, it automatically expired on September 13, 2004.

The decade the law was in effect nonetheless resulted in a unique experiment, allowing us to discern what impact, if any, the ban had on gun violence in general and mass shootings in particular. As to the former, the academic consensus seems to be that the AWB had a minimal impact on reducing violent crime.³⁶ This hardly comes as a surprise. After all, most crimes don't involve assault weapons. The real test should be: Did it succeed in its intended purpose of reducing rampage violence? The answer is a resounding yes.

Let's take a closer look.

The best way to assess the impact of something is to conduct what, in social science, we commonly refer to as a time-series analysis. Basically, that's a fancy name for a before-and-after test. Figures 7.1

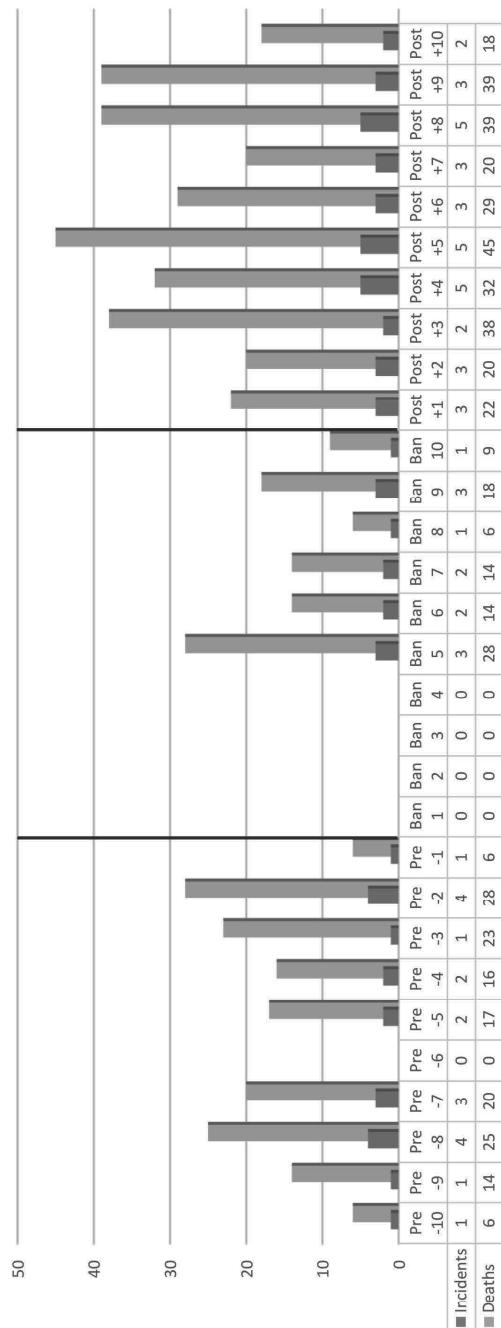


Fig. 7.1. Gun Massacres Before, During, and After the Assault Weapons Ban of 1994.

Note: The lines in the graph demarcate the start and end points of the Assault Weapons Ban, which was in effect from September 13, 1994, through September 12, 2004. The data are drawn from Table 3-2.

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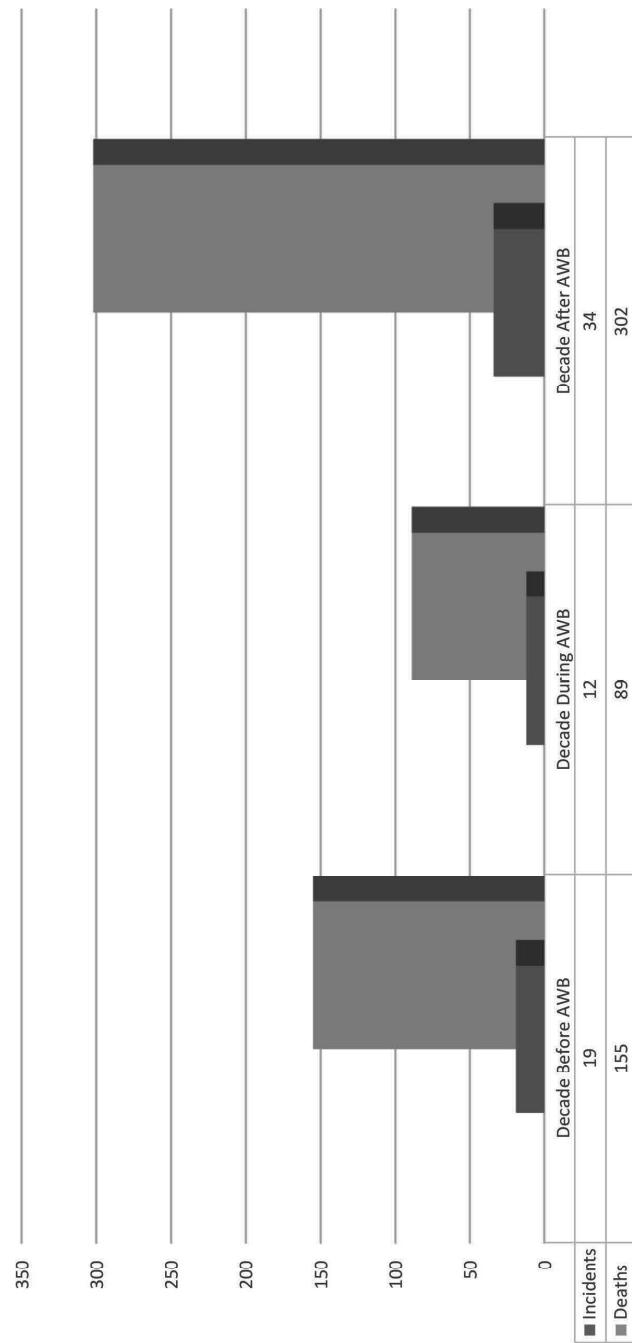


Fig. 7.2. Gun Massacres by Decade Before, During, and After the Assault Weapons Ban of 1994.
Note: The Assault Weapons Ban was in effect from September 13, 1994, through September 12, 2004.

The data are drawn from Table 3.2.

and 7.2 provide a look at the before-and-after pictures. In the decade prior to the enactment of the AWB, the United States experienced nineteen gun massacres that resulted in 155 cumulative deaths, for an average death toll of 8.2 fatalities per incident. During the ten-year period that the AWB was in effect, the numbers declined substantially, with only twelve gun massacres, resulting in eighty-nine deaths, for an average of 7.4 fatalities per incident.³⁷ What's particularly astounding about this time period is that during the first four and a half years of the ban, there wasn't a single gun massacre in the United States. Not one. This is unprecedented in modern American history.³⁸ Since 1966, the longest streaks without a gun massacre prior to era of the AWB were two instances of consecutive years (1969–1970 and 1979–1980).³⁹ Then, all of a sudden, from September 1994 to April 1999, the country experienced a long calm. As further evidence of the AWB's effectiveness, once it expired, rampages returned with a vengeance. In the ten years after the ban, the number of gun massacres nearly tripled to thirty-four incidents, sending the total number of deaths skyrocketing to 302, for an average of 8.9 fatalities per incident.⁴⁰ These numbers paint a clear picture: America's experiment, while short-lived, was also extremely successful.⁴¹

ZEROING OUT GUN MASSACRES

The biggest takeaway from America's experience with a ban on assault weapons and extended-capacity magazines is that gun-control legislation can save lives. But is there a way to get to zero? Is there a way to eliminate gun massacres once and for all? For that, we have to look overseas for insights.

One of the biggest obstacles to successful gun control is the ability to transport firearms across open, contiguous borders. In the United States, it's a problem that allows guns to flow freely from states with lax laws into states with strict laws. A common complaint frequently leveled by elected officials in places like California, Illinois, Maryland, New York, and Massachusetts is that people just need to drive across a state line and they can readily obtain firearms that they can then easily—if perhaps illegally—bring back into their jurisdictions.⁴² That